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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [11. Israel Labor Party Primaries](#)
- [12. Mideast](#)
- [12. Democracy](#)

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz cited the belief of unnamed officials that President Bush will make new suggestions for an Israeli-Palestinian agreement in a speech slated for June 24. The event will mark the fifth anniversary of the speech in which he unveiled his "two-state vision" to end the conflict. The officials were quoted as saying that it is still unclear what new ideas the administration is formulating. The newspaper reported that PM Ehud Olmert's aides Yoram Turbowicz and Shalom Turgeman left for Washington on Monday for preparatory talks ahead of Olmert's visit next week. The officials were quoted as saying that Bush was expected to report progress on a memorandum of understanding to increase US military aid to Israel. The current accord expires next year, as does the civil economic aid package. Israel wants the US to gradually raise military aid to more than USD 2.4 billion annually, as the current accord stipulates. The officials were quoted as saying that the US sees increasing military aid to Israel and supplying new American weapons to the Gulf states as important steps to bolster moderate countries in the region and counter Iran's rising strength. Ha'aretz noted that this is why the US wishes to supply Joint Direct Attack Munition bombs to Saudi Arabia, despite Israel's objection.

In its lead story, bylined by Aluf Benn and other correspondents, Ha'aretz reported that PM Olmert sent a new message to Syrian President Bashar Assad, in which "interesting nuances" were included, according to a senior political source in Jerusalem. The message was sent through Greek FM Theodora Bakoyianni, who visited Israel Monday and then traveled to Damascus. In response to the report, Greek Foreign Ministry spokesman George Koumoutsakos, who is accompanying Bakoyianni on her Middle Eastern tour, told Ha'aretz in a phone interview from Damascus that he was surprised at the news. Israel Radio cited a denial by Olmert's bureau that such a message was conveyed. Yediot reported that on Monday Syria admitted for the first time that it had received messages from Israel regarding resumption of the peace process. However, Yediot reported that the Syrian leadership said Israel was not serious, that it conveyed contradictory messages, and that it tried to dictate conditions. Israel Radio quoted a senior political source in Jerusalem as saying this morning that Syria is not responding to Israel's overtures because it wants contacts with Israel to go through the US. The source was quoted as saying that Damascus is interested in making use of contacts with Israel to make gains in Washington and to lift the international boycott against it. Media reported that on Monday Knesset members from the Israeli Arab parties were irritated by statements made before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee by Farid Ghadry, the exiled head of Syria's tiny opposition Reform Party, that Israel should not start negotiations with Syria.

Ha'aretz reported that Mahmoud Abbas told Meretz Knesset members Zahava Gal-On and Avshalom Vilan on Monday during their visit to Ramallah: "I will not meet Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert until he agrees to unfreeze Palestinian tax revenues." Ha'aretz said that, in the meeting, Abbas added that the tax funds would allow him to bolster the security forces under his command and begin constructing a naval port in Gaza. The two Israeli guests presented their plan for the deployment of an international force in Gaza under the auspices of the Arab League, as was recently reported in Ha'aretz. Abbas was quoted as saying that he found the plan "interesting," adding that he could not say at this stage whether he would adopt the plan and promote its implementation. In addition, Abbas reportedly asked the visiting MKs about the reaction of the Israeli leadership to their plan. "The current situation is threatening to deteriorate into utter chaos. An Israeli incursion will bring about total anarchy," he warned. As for Abbas's decision to cancel his scheduled meeting with Olmert last week in Jericho, the PA Chairman explained: "Olmert gave me no answers, and I have no need for a photo op."

All media -- banners in Yediot, Maariv, and The Jerusalem Post -- reported on the second round of the Labor Party primaries that is taking place today, in which former PM Ehud Barak and former Israel Navy commander and former Shin Bet head Ami Ayalon are running neck and neck, according to polls released on Monday. Ha'aretz said that voting in the kibbutzim and the Israeli Arab sector will determine the winner. Yediot reported that the key to the election by the Knesset of Israel's next president on Wednesday -- be it Kadima's Shimon Peres or Likud's Reuven Rivlin -- lies with the votes of

Labor Party Knesset members. Israel Radio reported that MK Colette Avital, the Labor Party's official candidate, complained about harassment by supporters of Peres.

All media reported that at least 11 Palestinians died in Fatah-Hamas clashes in the Gaza Strip, and that more than 40 were injured, hours after an Egyptian-brokered cease-fire was supposedly implemented.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, "in a significant diplomatic shift," French President Nicolas Sarkozy will invite Hezbollah to take part in a conference on Lebanon scheduled for later this month in Paris, and begin "engaging" Syria. New French FM Bernard Kouchner has invited delegates from across Lebanon's political and religious divide to the conference aimed at quelling Lebanon's violence and political strife. The Jerusalem Post said that, in another sign that France has decided to step up its involvement in the Middle East, Sarkozy is to meet PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas in Paris next week. Regarding Syria, The Jerusalem Post quoted diplomatic sources in Jerusalem as saying that France had let Damascus know that it is willing to reengage with it, but that it would not in any way back down from its firm support for an international tribunal to try suspects in the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese premier Rafiq Hariri, or from its demand that Damascus "keep its hands off" of Lebanon. The Jerusalem Post said that the view in Jerusalem is that Sarkozy wants to bring about a gradual thaw in ties, in order to play the "honest broker" and stabilize Lebanon. The conference in Paris, according to this assessment, is part of this effort. The newspaper wrote that the invitation to Hezbollah largely puts an end to hopes articulated in Jerusalem after Sarkozy's election victory that he might be persuaded to place Hezbollah on Europe's list of terrorist organizations, a position that was opposed by Chirac.

Electronic media reported that four Qassam rockets were fired at the western Negev this morning, lightly wounding several Israelis.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio quoted the IDF as saying on Monday that it would allow a protest rally to be held at the former West Bank settlement of Homesh today, the first time protesters have been legally allowed to demonstrate at the site since it was evacuated in 2005.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, in an effort to improve quality of life in the West Bank, the IDF and the Civil Administration in the territories have allocated 5 million shekels (around USD 1.2 million) to upgrade the Hawara Crossing north of Nablus, the main passageway between Ramallah and the northern part of the West Bank.

Britain's Higher Education Minister Bill Rammell was quoted as saying on Monday in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that the British media generally present all sides of the conflicts raging in the Middle East and that they are "more balanced" than their critics in Israel contend. On an unrelated matter, The Jerusalem Post wrote that the Anti-Defamation League has launched a new series of print and online advertisements aimed at combating the campaign among British trade unions to boycott Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a Capitol Hill rally on Sunday against the Israeli occupation attracted smaller numbers than expected.

The Jerusalem Post quoted the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions as saying on Monday that an unnamed Orthodox American Jew has donated USD 1.5 million to fund a campaign against the demolition of Palestinian and Bedouin homes throughout Israel and the territories.

Ha'aretz reported that Jewish residents of a house in the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan, whose evacuation was ordered by a court, have a chance to stay, judging by the pressure exerted by the municipality.

Maariv and other media quoted Iranian Admiral Ali Shamkhani as saying in the American magazine Defense News that, if Iran is attacked, it would bombard the Gulf states, mainly Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain.

The Jerusalem Post reported that environmental activists are urging the GOI to rehabilitate the lower Jordan River after the cultural landscape was declared an "Endangered Cultural Heritage Site" by the Watch List of the World Monuments Fund, the leading body for the protection of monuments.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted an organizer of the Cairo Film Festival as saying that the festival will not allow any Israeli movie to be screened.

Ha'aretz reported that a court headed by former High Court Justice Theodor Or will soon announce that Maj. Gen. (Res.) Eli Zeira, who headed IDF Intelligence during the Yom Kippur War in 1973, leaked the identity of a senior Mossad agent who operated in Egypt before the war.

Ha'aretz reported that the Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA) decided on Monday not to cancel its English-language radio news broadcasts, despite earlier threats to do so as a cost-saving measure. The future of IBA TV news broadcasts, however, remains unclear.

The Jerusalem Post reported that North America is the latest marketing target of the Tourism Ministry, which said on Monday that it will spend USD 11 million to attract more visitors from the continent to Israel.

Yediot ran a feature about Joel Covington (a.k.a. Rebel Sun), an African-American hip-hop singer from Baltimore, who, together with his wife Shoshana, visited Israel in 1999 and fell in love with the country. The newspaper reported that he has just been granted Israeli citizenship.

I. Israel Labor Party Primaries:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The decision today is Labor's to make. Starting tomorrow, the decision will move to Kadima: either a different leadership and a continued coalition partnership with Labor, or preparations for elections."

Political parties correspondent Nadav Eyal wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "The Labor Party, which was the last hope of toppling Olmert, gave him a pardon for his sins."

Block Quotes:

II. "New Labor Leader Needs to Lead"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (6/12): "On Monday Ha'aretz reported that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will decide which senior ministerial portfolio in his restructured government will be offered to the Labor Party depending on who wins its primary: Ehud Barak or Ami Ayalon. If Barak, a strategist par excellence, is victorious, he will be given defense, which will be taken from Amir Peretz. However, if the victor is Ayalon, who is an ally of Peretz and is partnered with MK Avishay Braverman, then Olmert will give him the treasury and transfer defense to Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz. By revealing his intentions, Olmert is carrying out a twin maneuver: internally and externally. Internally, for the ears of his Kadima party, he is signaling that he is capable of promoting another senior minister as a potential rival along with Tzipi Livni, who called for his resignation, but has kept quiet and stayed in his government. Externally, for the Knesset, the public, and perhaps even the Bush administration, which will host him next week, he is trying to give the impression of stability and that he is a survivor. The message is that it does not matter who will head Labor tomorrow; the sole question is which portfolio in the Olmert cabinet he will hold.... The decision today is Labor's to make. Starting tomorrow, the decision will move to Kadima: either a different leadership and a continued coalition partnership with Labor, or preparations for elections."

II. "The Real Winner: Ehud Olmert"

Political parties correspondent Nadav Eyal wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (6/12): "The race in the Labor Party is coming to an end, and in the short term, it has only one certain winner: Ehud Olmert. The two candidates began this battle determined to do away with Olmert within his party.... Both explained their position with an ethical and leadership concept that demands that the Prime Minister take responsibility for the fiascos in the Lebanon war. And then the campaign grabbed hold of them. The two, each for his own reasons, softened, compromised, became vague, withdrew, and wriggled.... The Labor Party, which was the last hope of toppling Olmert, gave him a pardon for his sins..... After Olmert, the second person to benefit is Binyamin Netanyahu, who gained public relations material for the Likud for free. This was the dirtiest race in the Labor Party since Rabin-Peres in 1992."

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Palestinian affairs correspondent Danny Rubinstein wrote in the left leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "In Gaza ... groups ostensibly operating in the name of Islam have already been spotted. In this context it is perhaps worth reconsidering the boycott of the Palestinian unity government in which Hamas is a partner." The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The irony [in the shift in US Mideast policy] is that this, except for refusing to withdraw from Iraq, means it is close to the views of Bush's more mainstream domestic enemies."

The ultra-Orthodox Hamodi'a editorialized: "It would be hard to expect from those who do not feel pity for their own brothers and kinsmen that they behave humanely vis-a-vis others."

Block Quotes:

II. "In the Name of Islam?"

Palestinian affairs correspondent Danny Rubinstein wrote in the left leaning, independent Ha'aretz (6/12): "It emerged last week that the group [Fatah al-Islam] is holding up, and all because of the weak and divided Lebanese government. It is not a coincidence that the Muslim extremists have situated themselves in this refugee camp and in other camps in Lebanon where there is no government presence and no law and order. This is precisely the direction the Gaza Strip is taking. Abandonment by the government, lawlessness, and poverty are fertile ground for the organizing of terrorists. In Gaza, similar groups ostensibly operating in the name of Islam have already been spotted. In this context it is perhaps worth reconsidering the boycott of the Palestinian unity government in which Hamas is a partner. The boycott is increasing the bitterness and distress, weighing down Hamas, and encouraging the development of organizations along the lines of Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon. It is not only the Palestinians who will pay the price for this, but also Israel, which did not want Hamas and is getting Al-Qaida. This appears to be the opinion of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who said at the end of last week that Hamas is sending positive signals concerning peace, and hinted that these should be answered."

II. "Identifying America's Top Mideast Priority"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (6/12): "What has happened in the last few months is that the [US] administration has heeded the criticisms of its mainstream and, to a lesser extent, more extreme critics. In the latter case, it has reduced the policy of pressuring Syria and Iran through isolation. High-ranking US officials met with both.... The democracy policy is downgraded or dead. And Fatah, despite its continued terrorism and radicalism, is seen mainly as a bulwark against radical Islamism.... In addition, US policy wants to keep European countries happy by not going

further than they want on Iran while showing them that it is energetically pursuing Israel-Palestinian negotiations. The bottom line is that US policy has now become pretty much a historically mainstream one, a new Cold War with the names changed, a traditional alignment of more moderate against more radical Arabs and Muslims. The irony is that this, except for refusing to withdraw from Iraq, means it is close to the views of Bush's more mainstream domestic enemies."

III. "How Will They Treat Others?"

The ultra-Orthodox Hamodi'a editorialized (6/12): "Current events in the Gaza Strip apparently are a domestic Palestinian affair. But it would be a mistake to treat those episodes only this way. This is because those bloody riots might have repercussions in the entire region. As we witnessed in the past, terrorists from various groups tried to vent internal frustration by carrying out terrorist attacks against Jews. This is also because the brutality they are demonstrating among themselves should kindle warning lights and indicate with whom exactly Israel is dealing. It would be hard to expect from those who do not feel pity for their own brothers and kinsmen that they behave humanely vis-a-vis others."

13. Democracy:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Israel should not fail to recognize, in the words of the Prague Charter, 'the profound moral difference between free societies and societies ruled by fear.'"

Block Quotes:

"Support the Prague Charter"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (6/12): "Just before the G-8 leaders met in Germany last weekend, an international summit took place that was arguably of greater historic significance. It was a summit of top dissidents from all over the world, and was attended by the world's most famous 'dissident,' President George W. Bush.... The Prague Charter, signed by [Natan] Sharansky, [Vaclav] Havel, and [Jose Maria] Aznar, listed 10 ways that 'governments and peoples throughout the free world [can] help those trying to build free societies'.... Even small nations, such as Israel, can do their part to support dissidents and stand for those struggling for freedoms that we often take for granted. Australia, for example, was the first nation to raise the issue of Soviet Jewry in the United Nations. Israel, for its part, can do more to examine its relationship with unsavory regimes, such as the one in Beijing. It is not enough anymore to act as if human rights concerns are a luxury we cannot afford when considering military relationships. Israel should not fail to recognize, in the words of the Prague Charter, 'the profound moral difference between free societies and societies ruled by fear.' Nor is this only a matter of morality. 'The protection of human rights is critical to international peace and security,' the Charter argues, because "countries that do not respect the rights of their people are unlikely to respect the rights of their neighbors."

JONES